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SUBJECT: CABLE/PRT JALALABAD: 6 MONTH REPORT ON SECURITY,
POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, AND SOCIAL CONDITIONS

¶1. (U) Summary: Nangarhar province is an important urban and agricultural center along Afghanistan's eastern border. During the past six months, the security climate has witnessed increased enemy activity, including IED attacks and ambushes of PRT convoys. The paving of roads and a dramatic reduction of poppy cultivation were major achievements; however, corruption and weak infrastructure (electricity and civil aviation capacity) limit the viability of competitive alternatives to poppy growing. Inadequate health care and education limit labor productivity. The establishment of a functioning Provincial Coordinating Council is a positive development. There have not been many gains in the lives of women, who remain confined to the home due to cultural restrictions. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Nangarhar province is the most densely populated province in Afghanistan, with the second largest population, but one of the smallest land areas of any province. An important agricultural province, dominated by the fertile Kabul River valley, the province's mild climate allows many farmers to grow three crops a year. Jalalabad, the capital city, is the cultural, political, and economic center for the whole eastern region and acts as the major market and supply source for the region. The current population of Jalalabad is estimated at half a million people and is rapidly growing. The province shares a long border with Pakistan, and the major highway connecting Kabul and Islamabad runs east-west across the width of the province, connected to Pakistan at the Torkham border. A high volume of Pakistani imports come through Jalalabad on to Kabul and the rest of Afghanistan.

Security Situation

¶3. (SBU) During the past six months, Nangarhar experienced an increase in enemy activity leading up to the celebration of Eid. This included an ambush on

a PRT convoy, and an IED attack in Khogyani that killed the district subgovernor, police chief, and NDS chief. Another IED attack in the same district targeted a UNOPS vehicle there in conjunction with USAID-funded road work. A security officer was seriously injured. Following Eid, there has been a steady amount of IED incidents. These have included an IED attack on the subgovernor of Kama on January 18, and a similar attack the following week on the subgovernor of Pachir Wa Agam. There are continuing reports of insurgents' plans to target ISAF and Afghan security forces. The people of Nangarhar are still largely supportive of the Afghan government and ISAF, and have in many cases turned in IEDs from around the province. The arrest of Dr. Mohammed Hanif, former Taliban spokesman, as he was crossing from Pakistan into Nangarhar, was another major victory.

Political Situation and Governance

¶4. (U) Corruption and bribery are almost universally acknowledged as "enemy number one" in the province. Residents believe that until corruption is curbed, the battles against poppy and terrorism cannot be won. The visit of Afghan Attorney General Sabit in December brought high hopes to many in the province, but most feel disappointed that he ultimately only arrested the "small fish" and none of the "big guys". Some of those arrested have already been released.

¶5. (SBU) Another major change was the departure of

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both the Chief of Police and the Commander of the Border Police in mid-January. General Abdul Basir Salangi, who had a history of corruption and human rights violations, was transferred to Parwan province as Deputy Governor. The ABP Commander, General Haji Abdul Zahir, has been reassigned to head the Eighth Brigade in Takhar Province. Many people, including Governor Sherzai, had pushed for the removal of both.

¶6. (SBU) The establishment of a functioning Provincial Coordination Council in the governor's compound was a step forward. The Nangarhar Provincial Council is active, yet still unsure of its role or authority. They appear to be splitting into two rival groups, one led by the charismatic and dynamic Chairman Fazlhadhi Muslimyar, and the other by Tahir Omar, son of Sherzad District "strong man" Zabid Zahir. The Provincial Development Council, on which the PC is represented, unfortunately does not function well, and as a result the PDC has to date failed to draft a Provincial Development Plan.

¶7. (U) Governor Sherzai remains popular. His aggressive anti-poppy campaign has shown results, with President Karzai acknowledging in a "Larry King Live" interview on CNN the dramatic decrease in poppy production in Nangarhar in 2005 (a decline of 96%.) Although poppy production increased during 2006, the Governor is aggressively pursuing an ambitious goal of zero poppy production in 2007.

¶8. (U) The police suffer from a lack resources and personnel. There are not enough police officers in the districts, and in many places a number of them are "loaned" to VIP's or other high officials rather than staying in the district where they are assigned. Lack of fuel for vehicles hampers their ability to investigate crimes or respond to calls for help. There is a large Regional Training Center for the police run by INL outside of Jalalabad, and the Joint Interagency Coordination Group of CSTC-A just

announced plans to add new programs, tripling the size of the facility. There are also plans to build new police headquarters in every district. The ASP program started building several district center facilities last spring, but due to a concern regarding payment to contractors in Nangarhar all work was suspended while payments were reviewed. The ASP recently agreed that funds should be released to complete construction and as a result, the district center construction in Nangarhar should be completed in the summer of 2007.

¶9. Nangarhar's complex relationship with its neighbor Pakistan has worsened during the past six months. While almost everyone in Nangarhar spent some time living in Pakistan during either the Russian occupation or the Taliban times, and most still have family members living in Pakistan, there is a widespread belief that Pakistanis are causing all the security problems in the province. The issue of the border and the Durand Line, the status of Pakistan's Northwest Frontier Province, and President Musharraf's proposal to build a wall and mine the border all contributed to the uneasy relationship.

Economic SituationQ-----

¶10. (U) The paving of roads in Nangarhar province during the past six months is one of the province's greatest successes. The highway from Jalalabad to Torkham Gate was completed and dedicated by President Karzai and Pakistani PM Aziz in September 2006. The

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road from Jalalabad to Kabul has had improvements also, which led to increased trade and investment along this major artery from Kabul to Islamabad. Meanwhile, most of the main roads in Jalalabad City have also been paved.

¶11. (U) Over 2,000 trucks cross the Torkham border point, approximately 76 km from Jalalabad, every day. However, there are many issues over tolls and tariffs, both legal and illegal, and a large group of Nangarhar businessmen recently called a meeting with the Governor to complain. They threatened a general strike if the situation is not resolved. Another problem is that the new Torkham highway is already deteriorating, due to the huge loads being carried by the jingle trucks (semis). There is a weighing station at the border that is supposed to limit the weight of trucks on the new road, but it has not prevented overloaded trucks from using the road.

¶12. (U) Business owners in Jalalabad complain that there has been less spending this past year, as a result of lower incomes after the 2005 reduction in poppy cultivation. While USAID has a very active Alternative Livelihood program, the loss of income from the highly profitable poppy has hurt the region's economy.

¶13. (U) Public Services - The availability of power in Jalalabad has deteriorated in the last six months. The major source of power, the Russian built Darunta Dam, continues to deteriorate. Even if it were fully functional, the system was built to support 50,000 people in Jalalabad, not the current population of 500,000. There are about 12 hours of electricity every third day for city dwellers, and no provincially supplied power outside the city. However, USAID will soon begin some \$8 million of rehabilitation or replacement work on the dam's three operational generation units. When the work is completed in mid-2009 the three units should have a peak capacity of 10

- 12 mw, doubling current electricity output.

¶14. (U) There is a serious shortage of teachers and school buildings in Nangarhar. Teachers complain loudly, and justifiably, about the ridiculously low salaries and large student-teacher ratios. Many teachers only have a twelfth grade education themselves. Schools do not have enough classrooms, and some do not have any building at all. In the district of Dur Baba, none of the eight schools have a building and all classes are conducted outside under trees or tarps.

¶15. (U) Nangarhar has two large hospitals that service the whole eastern region, but one of them, the University Hospital, has been struggling during the past six months due to lack of funds. The lack of electricity and running water is a constant problem. There are stories of people being asked to come up with payments during the middle of an operation, due to the hospital running out of fuel to power the generator for the equipment needed to continue the operation.

Cultural/Social Situation

¶16. (U) Nangarhar has a major university, and a good education system compared to other Pashtun areas. However, it still lags behind other parts of the country in terms of education and women's rights. While there are three women on the Provincial Council and three in Parliament, women are almost invisible

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outside the family home or compound. When they do venture out, they are almost always completely covered by a burka. They have a very real fear of being kidnapped or even killed if they do not follow the strict rules of behavior.

¶17. (U) Nangarhar does have its own TV station (NTV) and a number of radio stations. The Indian government is supporting the development of a local cable channel, and many people, especially in the city, do have access to news from the various media.

Comment

¶18. (U) Given Nangarhar's strategic location as a trade center along the Pakistani border, greater investment in the province would play a key role in boosting the national economy by expanding imports and exports. The ROZ initiative could provide a positive impetus in this direction. However, unless new infrastructure is provided (electricity), existing infrastructure is maintained (roads), the Jalalabad airport reconfigured to support commercial traffic, and corruption reduced, Nangarhar is unlikely to attract significant new investment. There is also a critical need for increased provision of services like health care and improved education to boost productivity and raise the quality of life.

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